

NEWS RELEASE



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OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA MAN SENTENCED FOR FEMA FRAUD CHARGE

Man files disaster relief claim for property that did not exist

Lafayette, Louisiana . . . United States Attorney Donald W. Washington announced that **LAWRENCE CHRISTOPHER JOHNSON, a/k/a LEWIENCE JOHNSON**, age 19, from Opelousas, Louisiana was sentenced yesterday to two years probation by United States District Judge Richard T. Haik for making a false claim. JOHNSON pled guilty in September 2006, one week before the date he was scheduled to be tried by a jury. JOHNSON was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$2,000.

JOHNSON was indicted in July 2006 following an investigation by the U.S. Postal Service.

In September 2005, JOHNSON registered for Disaster Assistance from FEMA following Hurricane Katrina. During the registration process, JOHNSON claimed that Hurricane Katrina caused damage to his primary residence located at 5821 Wall Street in New Orleans, Louisiana. As a result, FEMA mailed a \$2,000 check to JOHNSON for assistance with food, shelter, clothing, and moving expenses.

After investigating JOHNSON's claim, U.S. Postal Inspectors determined that the damaged address claimed by JOHNSON did not exist. Therefore, JOHNSON was never entitled to the \$2,000 he received from FEMA.

Sentencing in federal court is determined by the discretion of federal judges and the governing statute. United States Sentencing Guidelines established by the United States Congress and the United States Sentencing Commission are only guidelines for the judge. Parole has been abolished in the federal system.

To date, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Louisiana has charged 43 defendants with violations related to FEMA relief funds, and more than 155 FEMA fraud investigations are on-going in the Western District of Louisiana.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force - chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division - includes members from the FBI, the Federal Trade Commission, the postal Inspector's Office, and the Executive Office for United States Attorneys, among others.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Howard C. Parker.

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